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SOME ADVENTURES OF A NECROMANCER.

BY CHEVALIER HERRMANN.

IT IS certain that every prestidigitator since the world first knew of necromancy has met with accidents, and, although I have been singularly lucky in this direction, I was fooled once and in a very peculiar way.

I paid a visit to the Paris Bourse before the asphaltum pavement had been put down around the square upon which that great monetary institution stands. The square was then paved with a regular block pavement, which, owing to the great travel, was frequently out of repair. While inside the edifice I had seen the stockbrokers and heard them howl in their frenzy of speculation, and my mind had wandered off in altogether a different direction after I got out and stood on the broad granite stairs of the temple of Mammon with a few of the stockbrokers, friends of mine, who had gathered around me and asked me to "do something." A gang of workmen stood directly before us, and one of the stockbrokers said, "Why don't you play a trick on them?" I thought I would. I walked down the broad stairs among the pavers and extracted from under one of the cobble-stones a 100-franc gold coin, which is about the size of one of our double eagles. Instead of being amazed, the paver simply looked at me and said, "*moitié*," meaning half. There was a law, at least at that time, in France, that the finder should have half of anything found. I, naturally, did not want to give up half, and I thought it would be a good thing to find another coin, so as at least to show the fellow that it was a trick, and straightway I put my hand down again and brought out a five-franc piece. The paver looked at me again, his face wreathed in smiles this time, and once more he said, "half," which would be 52½ francs, rather a good day's earnings. Well, as I did not seem willing to give up

half, as he wanted, he began to talk loud. I then changed my tactics, explaining to him that it was a trick ; and to illustrate it I picked up a five-centime coin of the reign of Louis Philippe (an old pocket-piece I happened to have with me), but even this failed to satisfy the workman, and his wild gesticulations and loud talk having collected more than 500 or 600 people around us, I thought it best to compromise with him. But no, he would listen to no compromise ; he hung to his rights tenaciously, and I was compelled to give him half, not alone of the 100-franc piece, but of the five-franc piece as well, and then he insisted upon having even half of the 10-sou piece.

It takes either a very stupid fool or an exceedingly clever man to get ahead of a prestidigitator, and of the two I am inclined to believe that the fool is by far the more dangerous.

In 1863, when this country was engaged in its great conflict, I happened to be in Constantinople, and the Sultan offered me the sum of five thousand dollars in good Turkish gold, which I finally made up my mind to accept.

Towards evening a gorgeously uniformed escort came to my hotel and I was driven to one of the great palaces overlooking the Golden Horn. It was April, and one of those lovely evenings that one sees in the Orient, as one looks across the beautiful waters that divide Europe from Asia.

I was brought into a room, and in a few seconds all my handsomely uniformed escorts vanished. The scene around me, however, was so beautiful that I scarcely noticed their absence, until two Turks, each six feet high, and dressed in the garb of the primitive Arabs, stood before me. One carried a chibouk beautifully scented with rose water, while the other had in his hand a little gold salver, upon which were bits of charcoal ignited, a gold coffee pot, and a tiny cup and saucer. The Turk carrying the pipe moved it slowly from side to side, and I saw that the bowl of it was filled with golden-colored tobacco. The whole room was perfumed by the smell of it, and such an aroma I knew could only come from the leaf grown on Mount Athos, the purest and most fragrant tobacco in the world.

All this, of course, was very beautiful to me, and I felt that I could really enjoy a whiff of the tobacco, but at the same time a lingering suspicion came into my head that there might be just a little bit of opium or some such drug in my pipe, and that instead

of my doing a little sleight of hand for the Sultan, the Sultan was going to do a little sleight of hand with me. Sultans have been known to amuse themselves in that way. My mouth really, as I have said, watered for a puff of the golden weed, and the pipe looked tempting, with its amber tip and its bowl beautifully carved with Arabic designs. I made all kinds of gesticulations to the pipe bearer that I did not want to smoke. He pushed the pipe, however, upon me, being extremely polite all the while, but still acting with a persistency that showed me I had to do something. After I had taken one puff, which I thought was sufficient, the other Turk handed me from the golden salver, a very fine porcelain cup filled with ebony black Mocha coffee. The tobacco was delicious, the coffee very tempting, but for some reason my heart beat against my ribs, and the suspicion darted through my mind that I was about being drugged. Quick as thought I took the cup in one hand and the pipe in another, then presto! change! both vanished through the air and two small snakes appeared in my hand. The look of amazement and astonishment that settled on the faces of the two Arabs was indescribable. They looked up at the ceiling, magnificently painted by some celebrated French artist, they looked at the rug which was thick and of the finest of the Orient, then they looked at me with even more astonishment, then they salaamed before me as they would have done before their ruler, and both of them got out of the way about as quickly as I had made the pipe and the cup of coffee disappear.

While I was laughing inwardly at their speedy disappearance, one of the chamberlains entered and gave me to understand in French that I was to appear before his august sovereign. He led the way to a magnificent hall gloriously decorated with all the emblems of Orientalism, and I was shown to a raised platform covered with red carpets and hung around with damask draperies. The room was one of those open rooms that are so well known in Turkey, in which there are no doors, but great big circular arches on all sides hung over with silken curtains.

The first thing I did when I got on the platform was, naturally, to look for my audience, but only one person sat in the middle of the room, an elderly, portly gentleman with a nicely trimmed black beard and a red fez. I at once recognized his august Majesty, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, and he in

return, with a twinkle of his coal-black, brilliant eye, gave me a sign of recognition, which I supposed was a signal for me to proceed. From every arch and opening in the walls, however, came faint whisperings, which intuitively told me that while my audience in the front consisted of only one, there were a number concealed behind every bit of silk and every pillar. I afterwards found that I had appeared before over 500 persons, including the entire harem ; and I may as well say I did not like it.

There is a magnetism that a large and enthusiastic audience fills me with. Everything goes smoother under such conditions, while to have a secret audience watch me, and only one man in the front, makes me ill at ease. I was a very young man, and it was my first appearance before so powerful a potentate.

I went through a number of experiments, which seemed to please the Sultan very much. He paid as much attention to me and was as anxious as a small boy, and I could see in the twinkle of his eye that he was trying to fathom the mystery of my black art. He failed, however, and before I left Stamboul I was commanded to appear before him on his pretty yacht, which usually takes him every pleasant evening from Constantinople to the opposite shore of Asia. On this magnificent pleasure vessel I also had an experience.

During the passage we became more familiar, and I was brought into close contact with the Sultan and noticed that he had a most magnificent watch, which he consulted and handled as if it were the apple of his eye. This, of course, was a good thing for me, for, as I was performing before him personally, it was not etiquette to take anything from the audience. I therefore asked him to take out his watch and show it to me, which he did. I then said, "Will your Imperial Majesty allow me to throw the watch overboard?" He laughed at first, but a second afterwards his brow darkened, and he looked just a little bit as if he were offended with me for making the request. "If," said I, "I do not return the watch to you exactly as you give it to me, you can put me in irons for the rest of my life if you want to." The peculiar angry look that for a second had passed over his face vanished, and while all of his attendants stared at me and expected the Sultan to have me arrested at once, he seemed to take it seriously, and I have no doubt that if I had not returned the watch I would have been

put in irons. The Sultan, however, was a brave man, and after looking me straight in the eye with a piercing glance for a second, handed the watch to me, and I instantly threw it into the rippling waves of the Bosphorus. The yacht careened over, for every individual, from the cabin boy on the forecastle to the Sultan himself astern, rushed to the side and looked overboard after the watch. I felt that if anything went wrong with this trick I certainly should be put in irons ; but I called for a fishing line, and instead of showing my anxiety at once proceeded to do a little fishing, while every one looked at me, not so much with astonishment as with pure disbelief in my ability to recover the watch, which was not only one of the things in the world the Sultan liked, but was worth a great deal more than any watch I myself had ever seen. My fishing, however, happened to be prosperous, for in a few minutes I drew up a little shiner and landed him safely on deck. I brought it before the Sultan, took out my pocket knife, ripped open the fish and presented the watch to His Majesty, in, of course, exactly the same condition as it was when he handed it to me. Turks, as a rule, are not very demonstrative, and I found in after life that to make a Turk laugh heartily is impossible. They smile, look pleased, and with their daintily pointed nails pick their beards, but on this occasion every Turk, from the Sultan and his blue-blooded pashas to the sailors in the forecastle, sent up one howl of delight that floated over the beautiful Golden Horn and re-echoed from the hills of Asia. You may guess how I did this, and I was very much pleased with myself, for the whole entertainment was a great success.

As I said before I was a very young man then, and my heart really beat with joy when I woke up the next morning and found that Constantinople spoke of nothing but "Herrmann, the Great." In every kiosk, on every street, and in every bazaar there was nothing talked of but the wizard and the watch, and I was just thinking that I owned not alone Turkey, but all of Asia Minor, when I was awakened rather abruptly to the reality of the situation. After having breakfasted, feeling very much satisfied with myself, I looked over the balcony and saw that I was the observed of all observers. The attendant informed me that his Imperial Majesty had deigned to send a message to me. I at once, in a grand and eloquent manner, instructed the slave to admit his

Majesty's despatch-bearer. I stood in the middle of the room, expecting he would salaam to the greatest man on earth at about that time. Well, he entered and he salaamed, and put a bag loaded with five thousand piastres before my feet, and over his head he handed me an envelope on the outside of which were numerous hieroglyphics, which, of course, I did not understand. I tore open the envelope quickly, and imagined that some new honors had been showered upon me. To tell the truth I had an idea that I would be made a commander of the Medjidie. The message that met my eyes, in pure French, was, "You are advised to leave Constantinople instantly." That was all; nothing more and nothing less. I had before been in Mohammedan countries and knew to a nicety what it meant. I looked at the slave and dismissed him not quite as grandly as I received him, and looked out of the window where I saw an English steamer puffing the blackest kind of black smoke from its funnel. I knew it belonged to a line of English boats which passes south of Greece, and went either to Snez or Alexandria, it mattered not to me which. I made up my mind that I would catch that steamer if I had to leave my baggage behind, and I did. I had done too much, and, alas! had become dangerous.

I have a great many times visited Turkey since then, and have always received the most courteous treatment and attention, but Turkey was not then what Turkey is now.

In March, 1885, while in Madrid, I appeared at the Sasuella Theatre quite successfully, for the house was filled every evening with hidalgos and noble señoras, and King Alphonso XII. was kind enough to view my performance from a box. He was so pleased that I was asked to the palace, and knowing him to be a great sportsman, I presented him with a silver-mounted saddle which I had brought with me from Buenos Ayres. He was exceedingly kind, and after I had performed a mathematical trick with cards, which pleased him greatly, he kept asking me continually if he could not be of some service to me. At first I did not accept, but a little while afterwards I thought it would be a great thing if I could make the King of Spain my confederate in a trick. He consented, laughingly, and it was so arranged that from the stage I was to ask one of the audience to write a number, when the King was to get up and say, "I will write it,"

and do it. Of course, with such a confederate, the trick was accomplished with the greatest effect, because my audience was exceedingly intelligent, and one that had seen some of the very best sleight of hand tricks, for at that time necromancy was studied for amusement in almost every noble family on the Spanish Peninsula.

This formed the first part of my entertainment before his Royal Highness, and I went back to the platform to my colored man, whom I had brought from America, and who became pretty well known all over the world as "William." Mrs. Herrmann had coached the darkey assiduously as to how to treat the King should he address him. He was told to bow in the most polite manner and say "Yes, Your Majesty," or "No, Your Majesty." In going behind the screen, the King followed me, but got there before me. William was leaning against some paraphernalia, and as the King was not in gala costume, the darkey naturally did not recognize him. In fact when the King addressed William, he answered him in the curtest manner, and the poor darkey almost fell dead when he found whom he had addressed. The King laughed very heartily, and whispered in my ear that this was a nice way to treat a confederate; and this led me to make up my mind to do a trick which would so astonish the King as to take it out of his mind that he had been a confederate of really great value. The first thing I did in beginning the second part of my performance was to take a blank piece of paper. This I handed to the King, asking him to sign it at the bottom. He did so readily, and the paper was passed from hand to hand and given to me. I conjured up all the spirits that have been or will be, and lo, and behold! the paper was closely written from the top to the place where His Majesty's signature was affixed. It was handed back to him, and, while he laughed very heartily, he said, "I will not deny my signature to this document, which appoints Alexander Herrmann prestidigitator to the King of Spain, and, as the spirits have done so, I heartily acquiesce."

The life of the prestidigitator is not, however, wholly devoted to sovereigns, and there are some incidents in his history that are rather unpleasant. One of these happened soon after I left Constantinople.

I had mapped out a tour of Northern Africa, and landed in Algeria. There were no railroads there then, and I had to travel,

as I did in India and South America, on horseback. After appearing successfully in some of the towns near the coast I started boldly for the interior, and in a short time encountered a tribe of Arabs, who made me a prisoner, and, in spite of all my gesticulations and attempted explanations, tied me to a tree with the evident intention of putting me to death. It was a situation in which I hope never to be placed again, but I was young and full of spirit, and I thought the best thing for me would be to do something that would so favorably attract their attention as to cause them to postpone, even for a little while, their rifle practice.

Algeria being in the possession of France, some one of the tribe, I fancied, would know enough of French to understand me. I had for some time before been practising a trick which consisted in having a gun levelled and fired at me, and catching the ball ; and by some great luck I had a few of the bullets with me.

I began to laugh, as loud as I could, in the manner my journalistic friends call Mephistophelian, and loudly proclaimed that my life was charmed, and that not one of the assembled Arabs' bullets could reach me. A few of the old greybeards went aside to talk the matter over, and as I was tied up there I could not help thinking that the Arab is one of the most intensely aristocratic races in the world. They stood before me in flowing white gowns, magnificent, haughty, athletic men, and as I watched them I felt that this race looked the same as in the days of Abraham. I had, however, but a few minutes to think, for four stalwart young fellows were told off to kill me. One fired and I laughed even louder than I had before and spat out the bullet on the ground. Then the others fired, and each bullet aimed at me fell from my lips as did the first. Then came the reaction that usually follows in cases like this with semi-savage races. They thought me a god. They gathered together all the things they had taken from me. They brought cool milk, and dates newly picked, and showed me all the courtesies for which the Arabs are so justly celebrated, and when the sun had sunk down over the sand mounds, they escorted me to another town closer to civilization, and made me a present of the handsomest Arabic gun now in my possession.

A. HERRMANN.